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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to identify the percent of 12-14-year-old male students' emotion management scores that demonstrated an at-risk level of emotion management functioning. The Juvenile Emotion Management Scale was administered to male middle school students to assess their emotion management ability in responding to emotional arousal. Students' emotion management scores that fall below 70 percent (104 and below) of the maximum score (150) are considered at risk for managing socially appropriate emotions. Data analysis indicated that 48 percent of the sample scored at 104 and below, indicating deficiencies in their ability to manage emotional reactions to stressors or problems found in various social contexts. The areas of deficiency for these students were in their ability to alter their emotional response to provocative situations and to manage feelings concerning what is or is not appropriate to a given situation. (Contains 9 references.) (SM)

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Running head: EMOTION MANAGEMENT: ASSESSING STUDENT BEHAVIOR

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Emotion Management: Assessing Student Behavior

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Introduction

School, which is generally recognized as a place for adolescents to learn socially appropriate behavior, has become an institution whereby interpersonal disputes between teachers and students have increasingly resulted in aggravated assault and the use of lethal weapons (Cirillo, Pruitt, Colwell, & Kingery, 1998). Many of today's youth are coming to school from backgrounds in which antisocial behavior is normative rather than atypical. These students are highly agitated and invested in antisocial attitudes and beliefs that legitimize violent solutions to interpersonal problems with peers and adults (Gresham, Lane, & Lambros, 2000).

Young people at risk for behavior problems typically lack the core social and emotional competencies necessary for success in school (Frey, Hirschstein, & Guzzo, 2000). A vast majority of students labeled emotionally or behaviorally disordered have disorders of conduct, aggressive and violent behavior (Webber, 1997). Children with emotional or behavior problems typically have a wide range of significant social skill deficits:

- problems interacting appropriately with peers or significant adults in their social environment;
- difficulties in communicating their physical or emotional needs appropriately;
- inadequate knowledge of social rules or manners;
- inability to correctly appraise social situations, and even disruptive behavior such as violence or aggression. (Quinn, Kavale, Mathur, Rutherford, & Forness, 1999, p.54)

Students having the most severe forms of antisocial behavior may hold schools hostage and pose serious and sometimes lethal dangers to staff and peers (Gresham, Lane, & Lambros, 2000). Their inability to understand the consequences of their behavior or an inability to "size up" interpersonal situations and plan appropriate actions puts them at risk for social functioning.

Many students grow up with below average interpersonal skills for dealing with others in a socially appropriate manner (Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, & D'Ambrosio, 2001). As children develop they must learn how to manage emotion strategically within a variety of social contexts so that their emotional behavior conforms to cultural expectations (Gordon, 1989). For example, children learn to alter their expression of emotion for social purposes to avoid embarrassing themselves by displaying an emotion that others would view inappropriate to the situation.

Emotion management has been generally referred to as the ability one has to alter their emotional response to provocative situations. In everyday circumstances, emotion management skills are often called upon to dampen one's emotional arousal, especially negative emotions such as anger and frustration (Thompson, 1994). People who have developed these emotion management skills, understand and express their own emotions, recognize emotions in others, and manage emotions to achieve adapted behavior (Salovey, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1993).

Emotion and the role it plays in interpersonal problems raise the possibility that emotion management can be used to restructure thinking (correct or appropriate behavior through emotion management skills), thereby reducing one's risk for social functioning.

It is believed that individuals differ in skill from with which they can identify their feelings, identify the feelings of others, and use the information provided by their feelings to motivate adaptive behavior. If a student is limited in emotion management skills, then his/her ability to repair their negative emotional state is inadequate, leaving the student at-risk to appropriately manage the intensity of his/her emotional state.

The researcher, in a previous study (McLin, 2002), demonstrated that there was a significant difference in emotion management scores between middle school male students who were assigned to either a High Group or a Low Group by their teacher or counselor according to the following criteria:

1. High Group (N=11) – positive feelings about self and school; no suspensions and expulsions; able to express anger appropriately; sensitive to others' feelings; shares, cooperative, and helpful; and friendly and involved with peers; or
2. Low Group (N=11) – negative feelings about self and school; history of suspensions and expulsions; problems controlling anger; aggressive or self-destructive behavior; problems in peer relations; impulsive; and not sensitive to others' feelings.

Using the independent-samples *t*-test procedure, the following hypothesis was tested.

H_1 There should be a significant difference between the mean score of the High Group and Low Group of male students ages 12 to 14 with respect to emotion management ability.

The result of the *t*-test demonstrated that the scores of the High Group and the scores of the Low group were significantly different: $t(22) = t3.12$, $p = .005$, which affirmed that emotion management ability was a factor in male middle school students' behavior.

The assessment of students' ability to manage emotion could be instrumental in designing interventions for those students who need emotion management skills training as an educational enrichment to either reduce socially inappropriate emotion or to induce socially appropriate emotions in themselves. Assessing students' ability to manage emotion also identifies those students who need to develop their capacity to make intelligent social decisions.

The purpose of this study was to identify the percent of 12 to 14 years old male students' emotion management scores that demonstrate an at-risk level of emotion management functioning. Students' emotion management scores that fall below seventy percent (104 and below) of the maximum score (150) are considered at-risk for managing socially appropriate emotions.

Methods and Procedures

The Juvenile Emotion Management Scale (JEMS) was administered to 12 to 14 years old male students to assess their emotion management ability in responding to emotional arousal. The JEMS, a twenty-five items paper and pencil test, has demonstrated to be both a valid and reliable instrument in measuring the emotion management construct (McLin, 2002). The sample was comprised of male middle school students (N=50), ages 12 to 14 years old, who attended a local middle school located in the Arkansas Delta.

Results

Of the 50 students who were administered the JEMS, 48 percent of the sample scored 104 and below (Table 1) which demonstrated their responses to managing socially appropriate emotions was limited.

Table 1

JEMS Scores of Middle School Males

	Score	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	**72.00**	**1**	**2.0**	**2.0**
	74.00	**1**	**2.0**	**4.0**
	77.00	**1**	**2.0**	**6.0**
	79.00	**1**	**2.0**	**8.0**
	80.00	**1**	**2.0**	**10.0**
	81.00	**1**	**2.0**	**12.0**
	86.00	**2**	**4.0**	**16.0**
	87.00	**1**	**2.0**	**18.0**
	90.00	**1**	**2.0**	**20.0**
	92.00	**4**	**8.0**	**28.0**
	93.00	**3**	**6.0**	**34.0**
	98.00	**1**	**2.0**	**36.0**
	99.00	**1**	**2.0**	**38.0**
	100.00	**1**	**2.0**	**40.0**
	101.00	**1**	**2.0**	**42.0**
	103.00	**2**	**4.0**	**46.0**
	104.00	**1**	**2.0**	**48.0**
	105.00	1	2.0	50.0
	107.00	3	6.0	56.0
	109.00	2	4.0	60.0
	112.00	1	2.0	62.0
	114.00	1	2.0	64.0
	115.00	2	4.0	68.0
	118.00	1	2.0	70.0
	121.00	1	2.0	72.0
	122.00	2	4.0	76.0
	123.00	1	2.0	78.0
	130.00	2	4.0	82.0
	131.00	1	2.0	84.0
	132.00	1	2.0	86.0
	134.00	3	6.0	92.0
	135.00	1	2.0	94.0
	136.00	3	6.0	100.0

Note. Maximum score = 150. Student scores that are in bold are considered at-risk levels for managing socially appropriate emotions.

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Table 2 shows the group statistics according to age, mean, standard deviation, and standard error of mean. According to group statistics, the sample of 13 years old male students' JEMS scores demonstrated to be the age group of concern (m=104.08); the sample of 12 years old male students' JEMS scores demonstrated to be the age group that had the highest emotion management ability (m=112.42).

Table 2

Group Statistic

Age	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
12	7	112.42	20.54	7.76
13	24	104.08	17.34	3.54
14	19	108.21	20.85	4.78

Note. The differences in the sample size between these three age groups could be a factor in mean of scores.

The data in Table 3 can be useful for identifying students who could benefit from enhancing their ability to induce socially appropriate emotions in themselves. The items that are of concern are those where the percentage of students (40 percent to 46 percent) responded to items that suggests a limited ability in managing socially appropriate emotions. The scale and items of concern are identified as follow:

Scale 1

- item number 4 - demonstrated that 42 percent of the sample have problems realizing that hitting someone is not the right thing to do;
- item number 5 - demonstrated that 46 percent of the sample have problems thinking of a strategy to use when angry that could help in decreasing the intensity of the negative emotion;

Scale II

- item number 3 - demonstrated that 40 percent of the sample had problems ignoring someone who is trying to cause problems.

Table 3

Students Response

Scale	Item	Percent of Respondents Demonstrating Concerns
I.	The degree to which individuals alter one's emotional response to provocative situations	
	1) Walking away from trouble helps me stay out of trouble	20%
	2) I felt myself getting mad at the teacher and realized that it wasn't the right thing to do	22%
	3) **I wanted to hit that boy but realized that it wasn't the right thing to do**	**42%**
	4) **I try to keep from getting mad by taking deep breaths or by counting to myself**	**46%**
	5) I enjoy making people laugh	26%
II.	The degree to which individuals manage feelings concerning what is or isn't appropriate to a given social setting	
	1) You've got to walk away from trouble	16%
	2) **W hen my friends began to argue, I immediately try to calm them down**	**30%**
	3) **If someone is trying to cause problems, I just ignore them**	**40%**
	4) **I don't let other people control me**	**32%**
III.	The degree to which individuals acknowledge an inappropriate feeling and repair it	
	1) **I try to think of good thoughts no matter how mad I am**	**38%**
	2) **When I'm angry, I try to think of something else besides my anger**	**38%**
	3) It feels good to help people	.02%
	4) I feel sad when I hear people making fun of old people	22%
IV.	The degree to which individuals act helpfully to others as a way of terminating negative moods	
	1) **Although I don't like Jimmy, I would still help him**	**34%**
	2) I enjoy seeing other people happy	16%
	3) It's important to me to recognize how others are feeling	26%
	4) I try to say I'm sorry when I've hurt someone's feelings	18%
	5) One should stop their friends from doing something bad	20%
V.	The degree to which individuals recognize emotions in self and others	
	1) I need to apologize when hurting someone's feelings	26%
	2) It's important for to know how I'm feeling	12%
	3) I enjoy helping others	26%
	4) When someone is sad I try to cheer them up	28%
VI.	The degree to which individuals respond to emotional arousal	
	1) I know how to control my temper	26%
	2) I usually think before I react	28%
	3) **I'm glad they decided not to fight**	**36%**

Note. The items in bold print are the areas of concern for this sample of 12 to 14 years old male middle school students.

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Discussion

The results of the JEMS assessment of the sample (N = 50) 12 to 14 years old male middle school students demonstrated that the limitations in their ability to manage socially appropriate emotions centered around: (1) their inability to alter their emotional response to provocative situations, and (2) their inability to manage feelings what is appropriate to a given situation. The information received from the assessment could be valuable in applying preventive measures to help students acquire socially appropriate interpersonal skills.

The data received from each student's response can be tailor made to fit the student's area of limitations to manage socially appropriate emotions. As a preventive measure, the assessment of students' emotion management ability can improve the school climate and build healthy interpersonal relationships between students and their peers, and between the teacher and student.

Recommendations

More research in assessing student's ability to manage socially appropriate emotions is needed to validate the scoring range of the instrument in reference to the subject's degree of emotions management skill (below average, average, above average). Research is needed to create the interventions and curriculums that can be used as educational enrichment for students to become socially intelligent for social functioning.

Abstract

School, which is generally recognized as a place for adolescents to learn socially appropriate behavior, has become an institution whereby interpersonal disputes between teachers and students have increasingly resulted in aggravated assault and the use of lethal weapons. Surveys of high school students reported that a startlingly high proportion of them are unaware of effective methods for solving social conflict.

As children develop, they must learn how to manage emotion strategically within a variety of social contexts so that their emotional behavior confirms to cultural expectations. Many students grow up with below average interpersonal skills for dealing with others in a socially appropriate manner that puts them at risk for social functioning. The purpose of this study was to identify the percent of male students (n=50), 12 to 14 years of age, who may be deficient in their ability to manage emotion strategically in various social contexts.

The Juvenile Emotion Management Scale (JEMS), a twenty-five item self-report measure of the emotion management construct, was used to assess students' ability to manage emotion. The results of the JEMS identified 48 percent of the sample scored 104 and below. A score of 104 and below suggest deficiencies in one's ability to manage emotional reactions to stressors or problems found in various social contexts. The areas of deficiencies for students who scored 104 and below in this sample were in their ability to: alter their emotional response to provocative situations; manage feelings concerning what is or isn't appropriate to a given social situation. These findings could be instrumental in designing interventions for those students who need to either reduce

socially inappropriate emotion or induce socially appropriate emotions in themselves for social success.

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